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THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE DELIVERY: A STUDY CONDUCTED IN PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA.

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ABSTRACT

There are different role players in the provision and support of extension in South Africa and the main one is the Government. This study seeks to report on the perceptions of advisors with regards to the role of partnerships in South African extension and advisory services. The study targeted a population of approximately 3 369 extension practitioners in South Africa from different occupational positions which included agricultural advisors, agricultural technicians, agricultural development technicians, senior advisors, and subject matter specialists. The findings indicate that partnerships are important in extension and advisory services. It can generally improve the provision of extension and advisory services in the sector. Provinces were differing in their state of awareness about partnerships, but when it comes to the usefulness of partnerships 50% of the respondents, agreed that partnership was important. Respondents identified six factors that are perceived to be critical for partnerships, namely capacity building, networking and learning, technical support, financial assistance, research, and new technology. Furthermore, three main strategies were identified to promote partnerships which include the use of formal agreements with partnerships, conducting needs analysis, and using invitation. The majority of respondents (72%) noted that the Free State Province was of the opinion that commodity organisations are very helpful in partnerships. The paper concludes with a recommendation of developing terms of reference (TOR) or operational guidelines for operationalising partnerships as well as the keeping of records to harmonise their contributions and reduction of possible duplications of service provision.

Keywords: Partnership, Extension and Advisory Services

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper specifically reports on the role of partnerships in agricultural extension service delivery and it forms part of a study conducted in nine provinces of South Africa. These partnerships include both formal and non-formal partnerships that was put in place between the Provincial Departments of Agriculture (PDAs) and other relevant stakeholders for the delivery of extension and advisory services in the sector. The main aim of the study was to gain information on how partnerships are understood, interpreted and implemented in the implementation of extension in order to improve service delivery in the Provincial Departments of Agriculture (PDAs) in future.

2. RELATED LITERATURE

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The practice where non-governmental organisations have emerged in many countries to concentrate on human resource development (HRD) and social capital development has been noted (Swanson & Sammy, 2002). Such programmes are in some cases an attempt to reach small and marginal farm households, including rural women. Other authors acknowledged that the trend is to recognise stakeholders who provide advisory services (Heemskerk & Davis, 2009). These stakeholders require a more formal, dynamic, and proactive structure to gain a more credible, authoritative voice. In this regard, two forums, namely Africa Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) and Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) provide advocacy and leadership for advisory services at the regional and global levels respectively.

The reason why partnerships are seen as a solution is because the state was seen as having a weakness of using a top-down development approach in provision of services which was bypassing resource-poor people and their organisations. Furthermore, it was observed that agricultural extension was seen to constantly neglect the issues and concerns of resource-poor farmers (Ashby, Gracia, Gurrero, Quiros, Roa & Beltran, 1995; Howell, 1986; Rivera, 1996). Partnerships were used to transfer technology to rural poor in countries such as Nepal in the form of organisations that provided veterinary medicines (AGvet), hybrid vegetables and cereal seeds, insecticides and pesticides. Partnerships have been found to be very important in solving farmer's problems especially since these services were wide spread in the country.

Partnerships, commonly known as role players, are involved in the delivery of agricultural extension and advisory services in South Africa. These include, for example, the government which is the main actor, non-governmental organisations, research organisations, academic institutions, commodity organisations, farmers' unions and other smaller groupings (Zwane, 2009). This trend has also been observed in other countries such as Nepal (Ojha & Morin, 2001).

Challenges and constraints facing the delivery of extension and advisory services in the sector necessitate the use of partnerships or role players. The idea of partnerships has been well demonstrated by progress Mills Community Development which is based in Limpopo Province (Zwane, 2014) and was also tested in Nepal (Ojha & Morin, 2001). The sugar industry in South Africa also has a structured service delivery model which is a partnership between government and the South African Sugar Association (SASA) through its research division, the South African Sugarcane Research Institute (SASRI). The advantage of partnerships is that it enhances farmers' access to farming inputs and it also contributes to the up-skilling of extension staff, thus enhancing the quality of improved and relevant agricultural technologies to farmers.

The draft policy document for extension and advisory services in South Africa further advocates for a pluralistic type of extension. In simple terms, it means the use of partnerships in the provision of extension. This approach is common and has been adopted in many African countries including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique (Swanson & Sammy, 2001). It should be noted that different approaches like pluralism do have unique challenges. It was argued that one of the challenges observed in the case of pluralistic approaches was to identify the mix of possibilities and business models best suited to supporting agricultural and rural development cost-effectively in ways that take local conditions into account (Ferroni & Zhou, 2011), and to recognise the role of farmers in innovation to enable effective coordination among various agencies (Qamar, 2005).

The study targeted all advisors in the nine provinces of South Africa. They were based on a quota from a population of approximately 3 369 extension practitioners in South Africa. They held different occupational positions which included agricultural advisors, agricultural technicians, agricultural development technicians, senior advisors, and subject matter specialists at the time of survey. The scope of the study was limited to extension personnel within the Provincial Departments of Agriculture (PDAs), primarily to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced and opportunities that exist in the delivery of agricultural extension and advisory services.

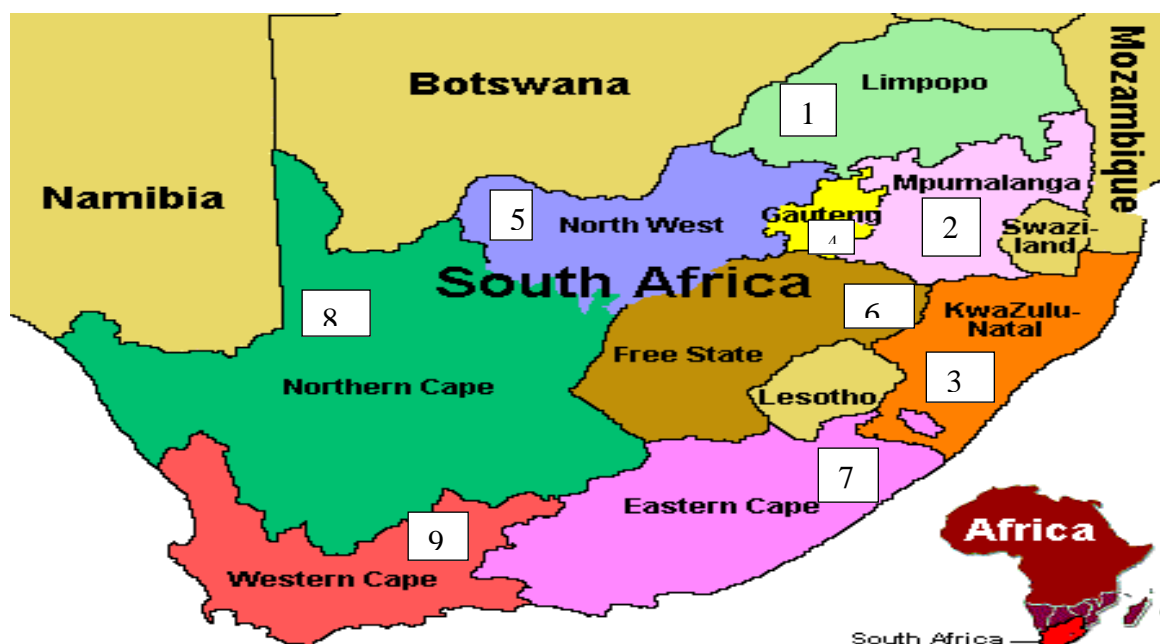


Figure 1: Map of Southern Africa with the nine provinces of South Africa (1-9).

Source: http://www.southafrica.info/about/geography/provinces.htm#.VofR_197IU

A quantitative research design was used where a structured questionnaire was used as the main instrument for data collection. Taking into consideration time and the possible cost implications of the study, various methods were used to collect data from selected extension personnel. At first, an e-mail was sent to provincial extension and advisory services coordinators to distribute the questionnaire to district managers who in turn facilitated data collection at district level. Some questionnaires were received directly from the respondents, while the majority were returned by the provincial coordinators themselves.

Provinces with low response rates were visited to facilitate and collect outstanding questionnaires. Furthermore, telephonic interviews were conducted to follow-up on some of the questionnaires, particularly where contact details were provided. The completed questionnaires were coded and data were captured in Microsoft Excel before being transferred into a statistical analysis programme, the IBM Statistical Programme for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 for analysis. Summary statistical data was extracted and then tabulated back into Microsoft Excel for further analysis. The functional sample details are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Functional number of extension advisors by province

Nome of province	Population number of extension personnel	Expected sample	Sample returned	Percentage	Rejected Questionnaire	Percentage
Eastern Cape (EC)	867	17	51	100%	0	0%
Free State (FS)	124	18	18	100%	0	0%
Gauteng (GP)	91	19	16	84%	3	16%
KwaZulu-Natal (KZN)	830	70	61	87%	9	13%
Limpopo (LP)	818	94	90	96%	4	4%
Mpumalanga (MP)	228	26	21	81%	5	19%
Northern Cape (NC)	55	10	10	100%	0	0%
North West (NW)	181	21	21	105%	0	0%
Western Cape (WC)	175	29	27	93%	2	7%
Total	3 369	338	315	93%	23	7%

Table 1 shows that out of the 338 questionnaires that were given to provinces to work with, 315 were returned for analysis. Furthermore, 23 of the total returned questionnaires were rejected. Mpumalanga (19%) and Gauteng (16%) provinces had the highest number of rejected questionnaires. The reason for the rejection was because a number of them contained incomplete information. A significant number of questionnaires from KwaZulu-Natal (13%) were rejected for similar reasons.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the findings with regards to partnerships and critical questions were directed to understand partnerships used by provincial departments of agriculture in service delivery of extension services, demography of respondents, extension personnel's awareness of partnerships, their usefulness, perceptions, and the capacity of PDAs to handle them as well as the recommended strategies to deal with partnerships.

4.1 Demography

The majority of respondents (108) had over 20 years of work experience in agricultural extension and advisory services. Furthermore, 64% of the total respondents were male. The study targeted the following categories of advisors, namely extension officers, agricultural advisors, agricultural development officers, subject matter specialists, and extension supervisors.

4.2 Partnerships used by the Provincial Departments of Agriculture (PDAs) in delivery of extension services

Different names are used for partnerships, for example stakeholders acting together might be called pluralism approach of extension (Heemskerk & Davis, 2009). In Ghana, they used the private sector, farmer-based organisations (FBO), and commodity organisations (Amezah & Hesse, 2002). As far as the assessment of extension partnerships used in the delivery of agricultural extension and advisory services are concerned, participants were asked to indicate whether they are aware of any partnerships in their province or area of operation. The results are depicted in Figure 2.

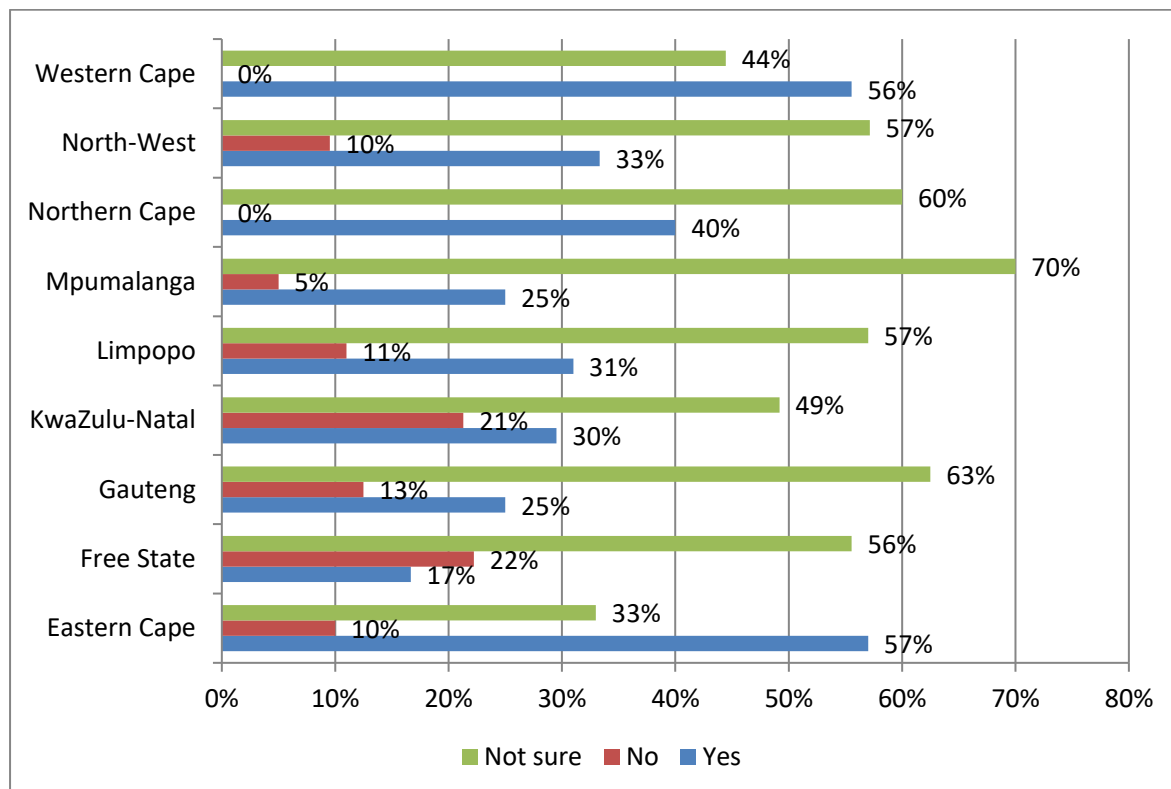


Figure 2: Extension personnel's awareness of partnership arrangements with other private extension providers in their province

Figure 2 clearly indicates that an overwhelming majority of extension personnel in Mpumalanga (70%), Gauteng Province (63%) as well as Northern Cape (60%) were not sure of any partnership arrangements with private sectors or any other extension service providers in their provinces. However, a significant number of respondents in the Western Cape (56%) and Eastern Cape (57%) stated that they were aware of partnership arrangements with the private sector.

4.3 Usefulness of partners in the delivery of agricultural extension and advisory services

There is a significant paradigm shift towards a more pluralistic type of extension where there is a recognition and acknowledgement that various stakeholders play an important role in the delivery of extension and advisory services in the agricultural sector. However, Düvel (2002) argues that for extension partnerships to be possible and effective, “the partners have to

interact in order to establish needs, to identify and agree on development priorities, procedures and processes to pursue them”. This is a valid idea and it is supported by Swanson and Sammy (2002). Respondents were asked to state the usefulness of extension partnerships in the delivery of agricultural extension and advisory services. The results are summarised in Figure 3.

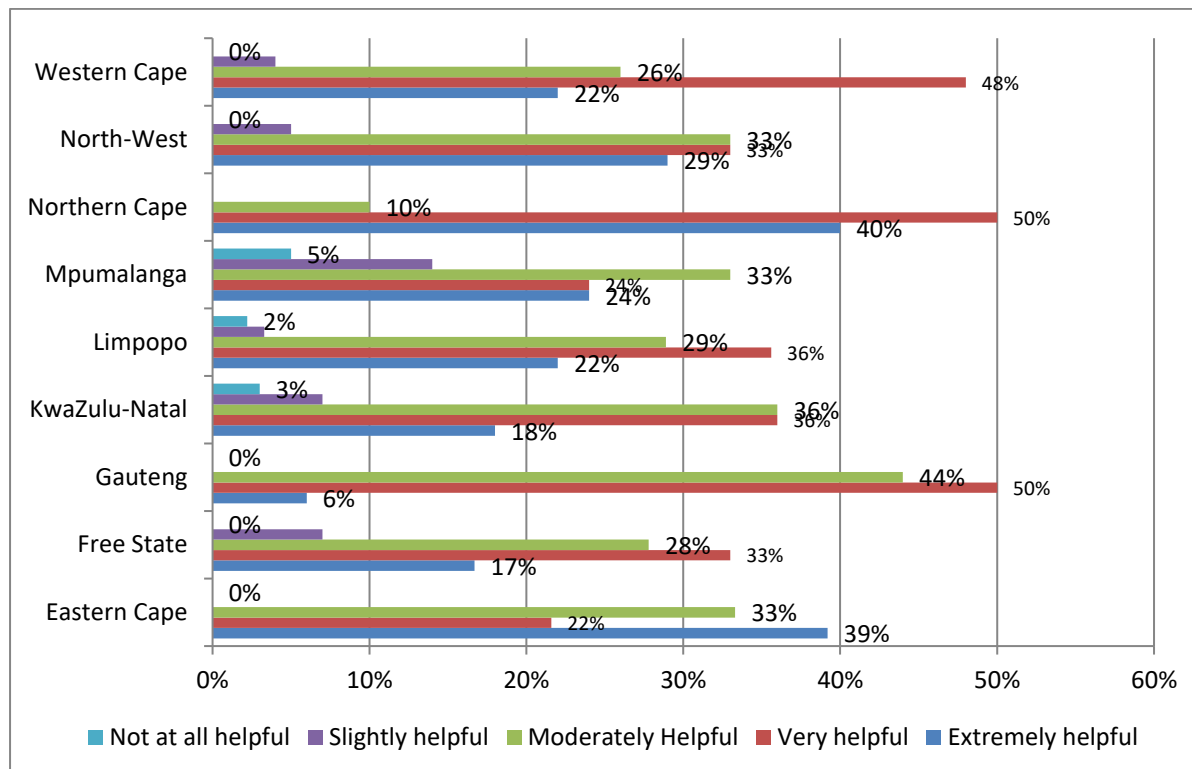


Figure 3: Usefulness of agricultural extension and advisory service partners (expressed as a percentage scale points)

Figure 3 displays participants’ perception of the usefulness of extension partners. The majority of respondents, namely 50%, in both Gauteng and Northern Cape provinces thought extension partners were extremely helpful. It is only in Mpumalanga, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal provinces where a smaller proportion of respondents indicated that extension partnerships are not helpful at all. This is in contrast to what was found in Nepal in terms of usefulness of partnerships (Ojha & Morrin, 2001). Experience in Limpopo has shown positive results as far as partnership is concerned, for example progress Milling which is one of the Milling company has established a partnership with Capricorn district advisory services and it is working well.

Similarly, in KwaZulu-Natal Province, a study conducted by Bhengu, Gillespie, Neen and Moodley (2013) showed an increase in maize yields from 28 tons/ha in the 2011 season to 38.9 tons/ha in the 2012 season for growers who delivered to the mills.

This was also attributed to coordinated extension, improved extension delivery and support to the small-scale sugarcane growers provided through the Extension Venture Agreement (EVA) between the KwaZulu-Natal government and SASRI. Therefore, the views expressed by Limpopo and Kwazulu-Natal might be attributed to the fact that such officials have not yet seen the merits or not aware of the activities of partnerships in their work places.

4.4 Perception on extension partnerships

According to the Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary (2016), perceptions mean “the way one thinks about or understands someone or something”. Respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions in areas which partnerships can play a role. They mentioned a number of factors which were classified and grouped under six topics, namely capacity building, networking and learning, technical support, financial assistance, research, and new technology. It must be noted that the list is not exhaustive but a summary of key few issues raised by respondents. These areas are briefly discussed below.

4.4.1 Capacity building

It was mentioned that most advisors are not competent and proficient. Extension partnerships could help to develop their capacity in order to improve their proficiency and competency including that of farmers through training. Logically, this helps in strengthening development programmes implemented by government.

4.4.2 Networking and learning

It was mentioned that some partners provide networking and learning opportunities to a wide range of stakeholder including extension personnel and farmers. To some extent this was an acknowledgement of the importance of partnership in extension and advisory services (EAS).

4.4.3 Technical support

One of the key values mentioned to be contributed by partners is that they offer specialised technical, economic and business information to smallholder producers. If such a partner is a commodity organisation this makes much sense.

4.4.4 Financial support

It is a known fact that most smallholder farmers lack critical access to finance. This is one of the key values mentioned by respondents that some partners add value in extension and advisory services through the provision of finance.

4.4.5 Research

Some partners are said to be conducting and disseminating research results that can aid producers to increase their production, and consequently improve their living conditions.

4.4.6 New technology

It was stated that some partners come up with new ideas and technologies that enhance the development of extension staff and the farming community as a whole.

4.5 PDAs capacity in the absence of partners

The capacity of a province to deliver on its development and extension mandate is of utmost importance. Participants were further asked if they thought the provincial department has the capacity to deliver on its extension and advisory service mandate. The results are depicted in Figure 4.

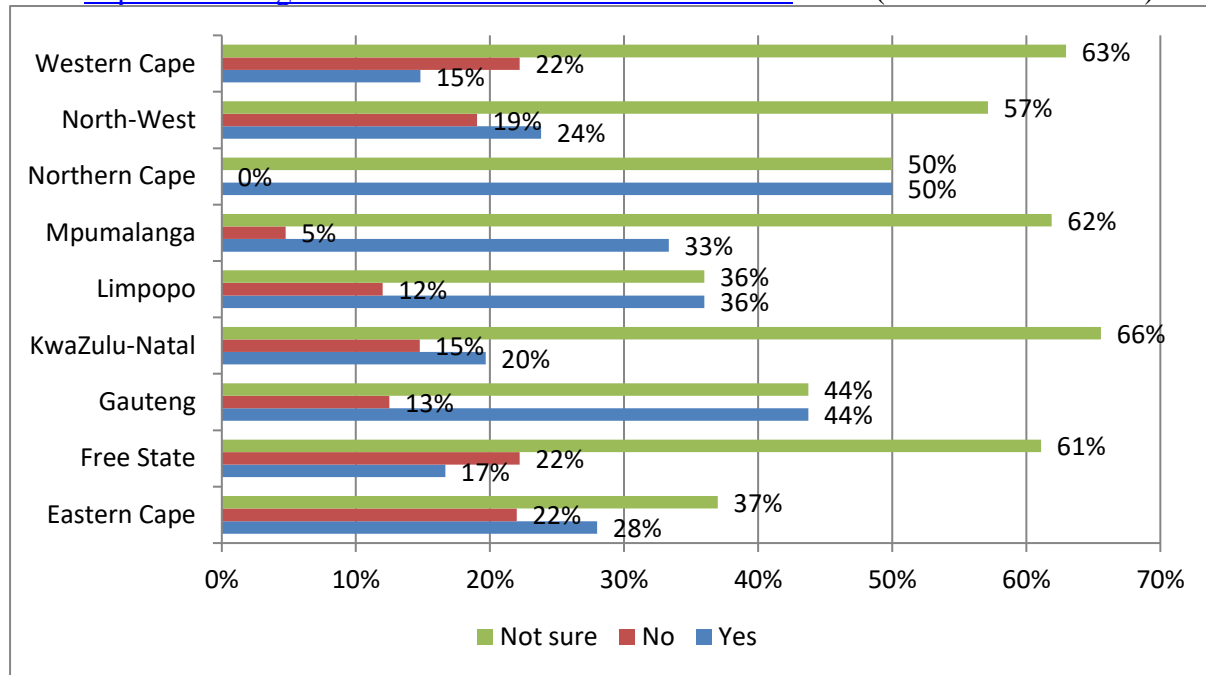


Figure 4: Extension personnel's view on whether the PDAs have enough capacity to deliver extension services in the absence of extension partners

Figure 4 clearly shows that most respondents, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal (66%), Western Cape (63%), Mpumalanga (62%), and Free State (61%) were not entirely sure as to whether their provincial departments have enough capacity to deliver on the extension and advisory service mandate in the absence of partners. However, a significant proportion of provinces, namely 50% and 44% in Northern Cape and Gauteng provinces respectively were in the affirmative. Eastern Cape (35%), Western Cape (22%), and North-West (19%) had the highest number of respondents who stated that they think their provincial departments did not have the capacity to deliver on the extension mandate in the absence of partners. There was no appropriate literature to challenge the response given by provincial Department of Agriculture.

4.6 Importance of commodity organisations as partners

Swanson and Sammy (2002) observed that as an alternative to public extension in some countries, private sector firms, including multinational seed and chemical companies, have become important contributors to agricultural technology transfer, especially to the commercial farm sector. Respondents were asked to indicate the value, if any, that is added by commodity organisations in extension and advisory services. They indicated a number of benefits and these have been disaggregated by province and presented in Figure 5.

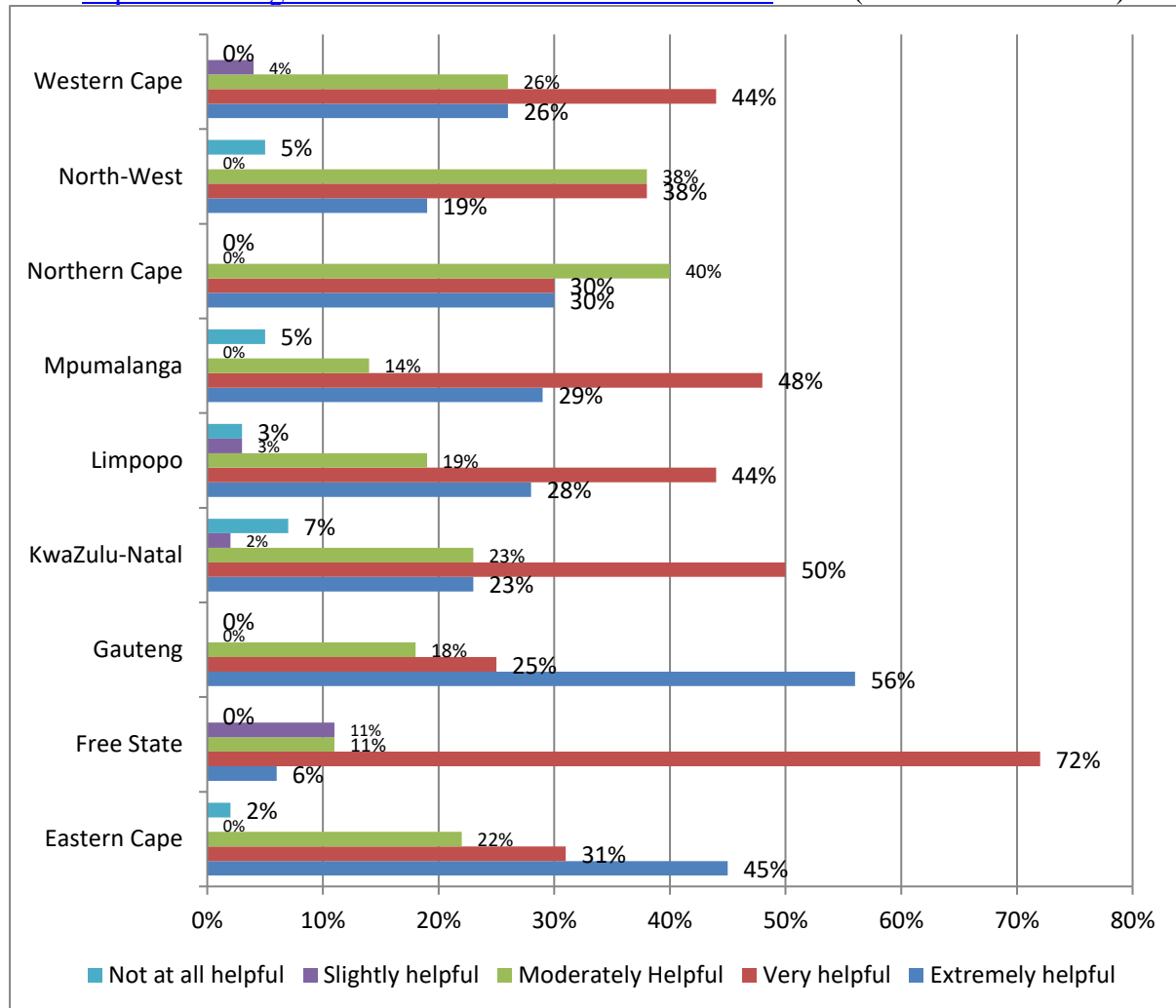


Figure 5: Importance of commodity organisations as partners

According to Swanson and Sammy (2002), the emerging roles of private sector firms and NGOs are becoming well recognised and appreciated as providers of extension and advisory services. Figure 5 presents the participants' perception of the usefulness of commodity organisations in agricultural extension and advisory services. An overwhelming majority of respondents (72%) in the Free State province were of the opinion that commodity organisations are very helpful, while 56% of Gauteng's respondents regarded commodity organisations as extremely helpful. In general, the response from all provinces ranged from moderately helpful to extremely helpful. Five provinces (Eastern Cape: 2%, North-West: 5%, Mpumalanga: 5%, Limpopo: 3%, and KwaZulu-Natal: 7%) had a smaller proportion of their respondents indicating that commodity organisations are not helpful at all. Views expressed might be attributed to the fact that such officials have not yet seen the merits or are not aware of the activities of partnerships in their work places.

4.7 Strategies to enhance the participation of extension partners

According to Ojha & Morrin (2001), partnerships ought to be involved formally. There should be agreed terms of reference in which the selection criteria for their participation are agreed upon. Respondents were asked to indicate possible strategies to be used in order to enhance participation of partners and the responses are consolidated and summarised as follows:

- **Formal agreements with partnerships**

It was recognised that partners are in most cases involved informally. The writers have visited a moringa project in Ba-Phalaborwa municipality. the farmer related the story which could have been painful had the planting of 10 hectares of moringa taken place. The partner concern did not want to sign the contract of marketing, the farmer felt the partner who promoted the moringa was not honest (Mushwana, 2014). Formal agreements can further assist in managing the relationships of partnerships which could strengthen the win-win attitude in both partners.

- **Needs analysis of partnerships**

Potential organisations that need to be in partnerships need to be assessed against farmers' needs and determine whether to strengthen or restructure it. This exercise will provide crucial information in order to understand what services they are providing to their clients. This step may further help to reduce duplication of services to the same clients of extension. The development of a database in which the services are categorised can become useful for future engagements. Once needs analysis is done, it should be able to indicate a few things like how the partners are able to mobilise resources, which resources are available for which tasks within the partnership, and the value of the partner in contributing to the growth of the farmer.

- **Invitations of partnerships**

In areas where it is known that there are partnerships, they need to be invited in various departmental activities in order to update one another and share experiences about how they provide the services. In case one sees that there is potential about a particular service provider they too can be invited to be shown the scope of work that needs help. This must be followed by good communication, like holding regular meetings depending on the need in order to provide updates on progress. The formation of extension forums in South Africa should be seen as a step in the right direction. The Extension Forum has been useful in identifying who provides extension services in the agricultural sector especially linked to the Departments of Agriculture.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has generated facts about the perceptions pertaining to the existence of partnerships in the agricultural extension sector. It has confirmed their usefulness as viewed by the extension practitioners in the PDAs and was confirmed by other researchers. It can be concluded after a thorough analysis of extension partnerships in extension and advisory services, that partnerships have the potential to reduce duplication of activities and can generally improve the provision of extension and advisory services in the sector. It became very clear from this analysis that most extension personnel are of the view that extension partnerships (including partnership with commodity organisations) could greatly help in the delivery of extension and advisory services in the sector. Based on the finding of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

- Most of the extension advisors viewed extension partnerships as a critical element in the delivery of extension and advisory services in the sector. As such, they are encouraged to keep a record of who are those stakeholders that operate in their areas in order to harmonise their work to avoid duplication.
- The various Provincial Departments of Agriculture need to develop terms of reference (TOR) to guide their focus and thematic operations in collaborating with partnerships.
- These TORs need to be consolidated at a national level in order to contribute to the development of a National Extension Partnership strategy.

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